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**“THE EUROPEAN MUSLIMS – ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY”**

1. Firstly I would like to say how glad I am to meet and speak to European Muslims. You and I know that Islam is not the religion of the majority of the Europeans. They are, if not practicing, at least nominal Christians. In fact Christianity is regarded as a European religion although in reality it is a Jewish religion. The truly European religion is polytheistic and centred around the belief in the gods Zeus and Jupiter and a pantheon of other gods. That there are Europeans who are Muslims is something the world still consider strange. Even I was not aware of the existence of European Muslims who were not converts but had been born Muslim in European Muslim countries or territories. It was only when Bosnians fought for their independence recently that I realised these are not Turks who had stayed behind after the dismantling of the Turkish Empire, but are ethnic Europeans who are Muslim. I realised that Islam is not totally alien to the Europeans. And what is more, such is their faith that they sustained it during the dark age of atheistic Communism until they regained their independence and their faith.
2. That there should be European Muslims at all is a blessing. I believe that many Europeans are now accepting Islam because they have lost faith in Christianity or they themselves feel spiritually lost.
3. We should be happy and grateful to Allah swt that there are still Europeans who are Muslim. But there is little to be happy about the present situation of European Muslims and indeed of Islam and the Muslims generally.
4. Muslims of today, despite succeeding in releasing themselves from the colonial yoke are still the most oppressed people in the world. They and their religion are regarded as outdated and incompatible with modern times. They seem unable to compete and develop as people of other faiths are doing.
5. Today we hear open condemnation of Islam as a religion which promotes terrorism. We hear disparaging words describing our Prophet. We see Muslim countries being invaded and Muslims slaughtered. And we see Muslims and their countries unable to help or protect their brothers and sisters because they are all weak or they do not really regard other Muslims as their brothers. Some willingly collaborate with the enemies of Islam to the detriment of fellow Muslims.
6. Yet we see many Muslim countries richer then they had ever been before, richer than even their rich detractors. We see Muslim countries holding the key to the well-being and prosperity of the world but this has not been used in the interest of Islam and the Muslims. In fact, if truth be told this unprecedented wealth has been placed in the hands of the enemies of Islam to finance the oppression of Muslims. In the midst of this wealth we see Muslims and Muslim countries languishing in poverty and misery unable even to feed themselves, much less to develop and prosper their communities and nations.

7. Instead we see wars between Muslim countries and sectarian violence as disputes between different sects of Islam flare up into civil wars in various places. And the rich wallow in their riches while still remaining undeveloped, backward third world countries. There is not a single developed Muslim country. They are great consumers of the products of non-Muslims, including the weapons which they often use against each other.

8. We see a state of denial among Muslims where they claim that although they are being oppressed and looked down upon, although they are poverty-stricken and miserable, actually they are better off than their tormentors and oppressors. In fact some contend that being miserable, poor and oppressed are what makes them good Muslims. Besides they say that although they suffer humiliation and oppression in this world, they would have a good life in the next. And their oppressors would be punished in the next world. Therefore they, the Muslims should be willing to suffer in this world because their place is in the next world.

9. This is self-deception of a high degree. Actually this world is as much for the Muslims as it is for those of other faiths. Muslims forget that when they pray to Allah swt they always beg for hassanah or wellbeing not only in the akhirat but in this world also. Indeed it is hassanah in this world that they ask for first, and then only for hassanah in the next world when they say :

“Robbbana atina fid dunnia hassanah  
Walfil akhirati hassanah”

10. How could Allah swt desire a life of poverty and misery of His khalifah in this world? It does not make sense. Besides the Quran states that all that is good is from Allah and all that is bad is due to us. If we live in a state of penury it is really our fault.

11. Besides the Quran states very clearly that Allah swt will not change the fate of the faithful until they themselves try to change their fate. Only if they try would the Almighty help them to improve their lot. Prayers alone will not change anything.

12. The question is, have we tried. The obvious answer is that we have not.

13. If we look back we must notice that the greatness of the Islamic civilization was due to the efforts made and work done by the early Muslims. We know that the early Muslims were great scholars not just of the religion but of the sciences, mathematics, medicines etc. I will not name the great Muslim scientists, mathematicians and other scholars here because you are familiar with them.

14. But today where are the great scientists and other learned men in the Muslim community. There are practically none. And why is this so? Is it because of Islam? Is it that Islam somehow obstructs worldly capacity, worldly achievement?

15. One way to determine whether it is Islam or other factors which cause the Muslims to lag behind in the world today is to study the performance of people of the same ethnic origin living under the same conditions but some belong to the Islamic faith while others belong to other faiths. We can study the Europeans for example as we have Europeans who are Christians and Europeans who are Muslims. But the European example is limited. Far too few Europeans are Muslims while the vast majority are Christians.

16. But the peoples of the Indian sub-continent are much more numerous and more evenly distributed between those who are Muslims and those of other faiths.

17. There may be other factors which affect the performance of people but one cannot get away from the impression that people of the same ethnic origins who are Muslims are less successful in life than those who are not Muslims. Somehow there seems to be a link between the performance of Muslims and their religion. We may conclude that Islam hinders worldly success.

18. But we know that at one time the Muslims were the most successful people. They succeeded in building a great civilization and they were what we would now call a world power. What happened which caused them to decline until they became so weak and backward that anyone almost could dominate and humiliate them.

19. If we care to study the history of the Muslims and the religion we would notice the decline of the Muslims was progressive and began many centuries ago. But the decline gathered momentum in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century of the C.E.

20. During that century the Muslim jurists gained ascendancy and they taught the ummah that there was merit only in the study of religion. Other fields of knowledge were irrelevant to Islam and acquiring knowledge in these areas earns no merit for the afterlife. In fact these subjects were regarded as secular and science for example would undermine faith in the religion. Science and mathematics were based on logic and frequently they contradicted faith. Greek philosophy too, by arguing on the basis of reason, could affect faith and therefore weaken it.

21. As fear of losing faith took hold Muslims avoided the study of science, mathematics and modern medicine.

22. Unfortunately at about the time the Muslims were rejecting the study of these non-religious subjects, the Europeans who had observed the progress and sophistication of the Muslims, decided to study the knowledge gathered and developed by the Muslim scholars of the past so as to achieve similar progress. They had been living in what historians call the Dark Ages until the European Christian priests decided to acquire the knowledge of the Muslim in order to catch up with the Muslims.

23. The net result of the Muslims giving up the acquisition of non-religious knowledge and the Europeans acquiring this knowledge from the Muslims was the rapid decline of the Muslims and the Renaissance of the European Christians. It could not have been coincidence that these two momentous things; Muslim decline and, Christian Renaissance should happen together with the changes in the attitude towards knowledge acquisition.

24. Over the centuries the gap between the Muslims and the European Christians in terms of progress and development widened. What we are seeing today, the domination of the Muslims by the Christian Europeans is intrinsically linked to the teachings of the Muslim jurists that there was no merit in the study of anything else other than religion. Muslims are certainly backward in these field. They have become the consumers of the products of modern knowledge and are quite incapable of producing their own basic needs even. In fact even for their own defence they have to source their weapons from the non-Muslims. In other words they depend on the non-Muslims for their own

defences. Yet the Quran is very specific and clear that the ummah must have the capacity to defend themselves.

25. Why are they incapable of producing their own defence needs. Surely it must be because they do not have the knowledge. They did not know enough about science, mathematics and all the other esoteric knowledge which are needed in order to invent, develop and produce modern weapons so they may defend the ummah. Because they have no knowledge of these non-religious subjects they are unable to fulfill an important injunction of the Quran – to have the ability to defend the ummah.

26. Even today we are taught that non-religious subjects are secular. Far too many Muslims want to have their children study religion. We should know enough about our religion so as to lead the life of Muslims. But must we all be experts in religion.

27. Is it true that only religious studies will give us merit in the next world? We know that in Islam there are two categories of obligations. There is fardhu 'ain which requires that we perform certain rituals and abstain from certain acts in order to gain merit for ourselves personally.

28. But there is also fardhu kifayah which must be performed by a member or some members of the Muslim community failing which the whole community would bear the sin, which the individual performance of fardhu 'ain cannot expiate.

29. Thus it is incumbent upon a Muslim community to have experts in the fields of defence, in agriculture and food production, in medicine etc so that the community is well provided for and can look after its well-being. If a Muslim community does not have these experts than the whole community would be sinning.

30. Fardhu kifayah is not much stressed by Muslim scholars and teachers as much as the rituals of prayer, fasting, zakat and haj. It is because of this unequal emphasis between fardhu ain and fardhu kifayah that today we found the Muslim communities backward, incapable of protecting themselves, incapable of good governance and generally weak and miserable. The result is to bring disrepute to Islam and the Muslims. Faced with problems they find themselves incapable of overcoming them. Instead they do desperate things which gain them nothing.

31. When I was studying in the English colonial school I read that Islam was spread by the sword. Now that I have access to more books and other sources of information, I know that it is not true. The real reason why Islam spread to the four corners of the world was because of the success of Muslims in life. We know for a fact that Islam came to Malaysia and Indonesia without any violence. The Malay rulers accepted Islam because the Arab and Indian Muslim traders who came to Southeast Asia in the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium were good pious people who were experts in navigation and were prosperous as traders. The Malay rulers were impressed by these great seafarers and traders and were willing to find out more about their religion of Islam. There was no force used. It was purely because these Arab and Indian Muslim were well-to-do and sophisticated people, knowledgeable in the teachings of Islam and in other fields of knowledge that the Malay rulers were well disposed towards them. Eventually the Malay rulers embraced Islam and their subjects followed suit.

32. It was the same in South Asia and elsewhere. The Muslim rulers of India could have forced their Hindu subjects to become Muslims, but they did not. Those who became Muslims did so of their own free will.

33. But we know that European Christians massacred the Red Indians and Amerindians and took their land. The survivors were forced to become Christians. In Spain Muslims and Jews were forced to embrace Christianity on pain of death.

34. Today Islam is not gaining as many new adherents as before because Islam is equated with failure, with being humiliated, with being irrational and given to acts which do not create a good impression of Islam or the Muslims.

35. If we want Islam to be respected, to win support if not convert non-Muslims we have to show that Muslims are good successful people.

36. In the first place we must develop a good capacity for governing our communities and countries. Most Muslim countries today are not well-governed and are not capable of development. They are largely consumer communities or nations incapable of industrialising and producing their modern needs. The education standards are low and as I said earlier they do not produce great scholars as they did in the past. In a fast changing world they are not innovative, always depending on others to come up with new ideas or products which they then buy at inflated prices.

37. Allah has given the Muslims more wealth than any other people but this wealth is not well managed. They are just spent lavishly instead of being wisely invested. They can if they want to, dominate the world. Certainly they can defend the ummah from oppression. But they have not made any attempt to do this. Instead they kept their money in foreign currencies, in foreign lands. And when these currencies depreciate in value they lose much of their wealth.

38. The rich Muslims prefer not to work. They prefer to employ other people to work for them. These people are like the mercenary soldiers of the past, who were engaged by Muslim rulers to fight and defend them. Eventually they become so dependent on their mercenaries that without them the Muslim, rich though they may be, would be quite powerless. At that stage they actually came under the power and authority of the mercenaries.

39. It is distressing to see rich Muslims setting up big business enterprises which are left to foreigners, frequently non-Muslims to manage. Often the rich Muslim pays huge salaries and compensations to these mercenary managers and cared not whether their enterprises lose money or not. Frequently the businesses are some kind of pastime or status symbol to exhibit wealth. They would compete with each other just to show what toys they have.

40. In the past it was the possessions of the biggest diamonds or other baubles. But today we see this exhibitionism in the form of possession of companies and enterprises, or luxury aircrafts and palaces. It is the same story of the Peacock throne or the Koh-i-noor.

41. It would seem that the wealth will be with the Muslims forever. But along the way some are bound the fall. Just as before, the Muslim nations declined and fell one by one, the future may see this thing happening to the wealthy Muslims nations of today.

42. Today's wealth is due to the need for oil as fuel. But will oil always be the fuel for heat and power. There are already other sources of power – the sun, hydro power, wind power, even waves. But so far they have not proven efficient. But if oil prices are too high they might prove worthwhile to use. Malaysia produces palm oil which can be a substitute for diesel. It is renewable. But it is at the moment unlikely to meet the huge demand for diesel.

43. But what if? Hybrid motors will reduce the need for petroleum. There will be less demands, which in turn will reduce prices. Maybe the prices will go down enough to turn a sellers market into a buyers market. Then there will be fierce competition to sell oil and prices will fall some more. And when this happens the smaller producer may go bankrupt or at least not be as rich as before. So the wealth from oil may not be forever after all. It behoves the oil-rich to diversify their sources of wealth. And to diversify they would need knowledge and skills in other fields.

44. The world is changing and changing radically. The speed and ease of communications will result in migrations of people. There will be in 50 years time or so no country that is single ethnic. Certainly there will be no country which will have people only of one religion.

45. What does it mean? It means that we will have to learn to live in multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies and countries. Muslims find difficulty in adjusting to life among non-Muslims. They want to preserve their customs and traditions – their way of life. Some of these may be enjoined by Islam, but many are based on the traditions of their races.

46. We need to learn to adjust to what is still acceptable to our faith. If we fail it may be that in every country there will be Muslim ghettos where typically the Muslims would be poor, backward and miserable. We already see this in some countries where Muslims have migrated.

47. This poverty and ghettos will not enhance the image of Muslims. It would be degrading. It would be a blight and a slur on the greatness of Islam, our religion.

48. This is very likely unless we learn to adjust, to make preparations for the coming changes. We must not forget our faith but let us re-examine what our religion really teaches us.

49. Most of what we believe and we practice are the results of interpretations of the religion by the learned ones in the past and also presently. We have seen how some of their interpretations have resulted in us becoming backward and incapable of obeying the injunctions of Islam.

50. Islam is not for the time of the Prophet only. It is for all times. If Islam succeeded in making the Jahilliah a great people able to build a great civilization, then is it not possible for Islam to do the same for the Muslims in our times.

51. I believe it can. But we need to go back to the original teachings as found in the Quran and the verified hadiths for guidance. I feel sure that if we do we will be able to

make the necessary adjustments in our life so that we remain good Muslim but yet we are able to adjust to a radically changing world.

52. I have mentioned earlier how the Europeans had acquired the knowledge gathered and pioneered by the Muslims and were then able to make use of them to achieve their Renaissance. But knowledge is just one element which contributed to the subsequent progress of the Europeans. They possess a culture that enabled them to translate their knowledge into the material progress that they have achieved. And one of these is their innate curiosity, their desire to know more and to apply their knowledge in practical ways.

53. European Muslims I believe still have this character just as Malay Muslims, Indian Muslims, Arab Muslims and African Muslims retain elements of their racial character, even after becoming Muslims.

54. European Muslims must make use of the European culture of curiosity, of wanting to know more, of practical application of knowledge, of the skills in organisation and development, of inventiveness, of developing methods in order to help the Muslim ummah to adjust to the changes that are coming, in order to make use of new knowledge and skills to develop their communities and to achieve progress in order to sustain their faith in multi-religious societies that at times would be hostile to their religion. They had done so when they were under the atheistic Communists and they must help the ummah to do so in the challenging world that we have to live in, for we would no longer have the protection of borders and the comfort of living only among peoples of our own faith, among Muslims. The European Muslims have had a unique experience and we the ummah must make use of their experience and their capacities to employ knowledge, new knowledge to the practicalities of life in a multi-racial, multi-religious rapidly developing world.

55. It is perhaps expecting too much for all Muslims to regard each other as brothers as enjoined by Islam. But those of us who can regard each other as brothers, and as brothers we are prepared to make sacrifices in order to help each other, should try to do so.

56. We proudly say that Islam is not just a faith, a religion like other religions, but it is a way of life, as Addin. If we believe that it is a way of life then we should ensure that all Muslims have a good life and to do that we as brothers should help each other.

57. I hope that our European Muslim brothers will subscribe to this and ensure that we share each others travails as we should share each others good fortunes.